

# CAPITOL STUFF

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By TED LEWIS

Washington, Oct. 10—President Kennedy showed at his press conference yesterday that he thinks it is wholly unjustified to criticize the way his Central Intelligence Agency team is operating in messed-up South Viet Nam.

It's a darn good team, the President said, in effect. It follows policy established in the front office and has a most reliable manager in John McCone, the CIA director. If there is any backbiting going on with the U.S. military and diplomatic teams in the Saigon league, it is among the lower echelons that failed to get the policy signals from those calling the plays.

This is all a little like what Ralph Houk, manager of the New York Yankees, had to say after his team lost the World Series in four straight. The lingo is not the same, but each expressed the same imperishable thought.

Says Houk: "I don't think that there is anything to be ashamed of, in spite of some of the things I have heard, and the things I know we're gonna hear."

(Credit Houk quotes to Dick Young of THE NEWS in his Young Ideas column, Oct. 7.)

Says Kennedy: "While the CIA may have made mistakes, as we all do on different occasions—and it has many successes which may go unheralded—it is unfair to charge them as they have been charged. I think they have done a good job."

(Credit JFK at his news conference.)

As Houk and Kennedy appear to react about the same way to the noise in the bleachers, they ought to get together and compare notes. They both have the same kind of innate loyalty to whatever team is under their command and consider any sour cracks a personal affront.

Their two clubs are playing in different and distant leagues, but their problems are about the same. Both teams outwardly have looked sour in the last big series. Bad fan reaction was almost inevitable because of the size of the money bags held by the front offices. Houk should have been able to field the perfect baseball team for the very good reason he could outbid all others for talent. Similarly, Kennedy's CIA, with \$700 millions to spend each year, was counted on to have the best players in the spy game that a capitalistic society could produce.

## The Lineups Failed to Deliver

So why shouldn't there be yelps because two teams, one in the Saigon league, the other in the American, failed to deliver 100% with lineups only big money can buy?

Houk and Kennedy are clearly a little sensitive on this score. Not apologetic exactly, but they have gone out of their way to show they are proud of their boys, even if, as the President says, they make a mistake now and then, as who doesn't?

The Yankee manager, however, has been a little more philosophical about his ball team than Kennedy is about his spy team. As



John McCone

*The team is always right*

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Houk has said: "Somebody has gotta lose; somebody has got to win." Kennedy only allows that after "looking through the record over the last nine months," he became convinced that the CIA team was playing the best it could and definitely obeying the signals transmitted from the bench—the National Security Council.

It is good to find this sort of spirit among bigshot team executives. Especially as both Houk and Kennedy in public statements stand behind any player singled out for Bronx cheers from the stands.

## Was a Ball Lost in the Viet Nam Sun?

For those who get a little off-base in a crucial series, each has provided that same generous understanding. Joe Pepitone lost that ball against the white shirts in the Los Angeles stand, and with it the Yankees lost the World Series. But Houk was equal to the occasion.

"You couldn't fault a player for it," said Houk.

The captain of JFK's CIA team in Viet Nam, John Hammond Richardson, had trouble with his perspective in the Saigon series, especially after new U. S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge took charge of all key plays.

Kennedy is not, if he can help it, going to have Richardson charged with an error—at least on the official scoreboard. On the contrary, team captain Richardson, in the President's opinion, has only been following instructions to the letter. Moreover, "he is a very dedicated public servant."

To Manager Houk's credit, however, he was honest enough to admit candidly that Pepitone had to be charged with an error even if the young first baseman couldn't see the ball. But in politics at the White House level, it is axiomatic that you never admit an error by anyone on your team. The proper method is to praise him, then fire or transfer him.

## The Yankee Fellow Had Better Luck

Pepitone, of course, will remain with the Yankees, but Richardson already had been thumbed off the CIA team in Saigon when the President praised him. He was ordered home "for consultation" last Friday because he had "lost his cover." This is different from losing a ball. It is spy agency lingo which means that when a CIA agent's name and street address become known, his effectiveness in the area is considered lost.

Richardson's cover was the American Embassy in Saigon, where ostensibly he had the job of first secretary and was therefore a State Department Official. Actually, he was the CIA chief and on the spy agency's payroll.

Richardson, unlike Pepitone, cannot give out to the public with an explanation as to why he ran intelligence operations the way he did. Everything in the spy agency is so hush-hush that he cannot speak up like a normal American citizen when criticized. Not even to say, as Pepitone did, that "All I did was see what was going on."